

CRICKET AT THE 1900 GAMES

by Ian Buchanan

While it is well known that the only Olympic cricket match was played in 1900 it is perhaps not so widely appreciated that cricket was also originally scheduled as an Olympic sport in 1896 and is listed in the provisional programme for the Athens Games published in Paris in January 1895. Owing to insufficient entries, what would have been the only team sport at the first Modern Olympics was not held.

There was no abundance of entries in 1900 either but in keeping with the informal nature of the Paris Games, two teams were enough to make an Olympic competition and at the Municipal Velodrome of Vincennes on Sunday, 19 August and Monday, 20 August a cricket match, which remains unique in Olympic history, took place. The game was played at the Municipal Velodrome de Vincennes, which is still in use today, and the banked cycling track formed an unusual boundary for the cricket pitch.

France, the hosts, were represented by a selection from the Union des Sociétés Françaises de Sports Athlétiques but so few of the member clubs of the Society actually played cricket that the team was drawn from just two clubs: the now defunct Union Club and the Standard Athletic Club which had been formed in 1890 by English workmen imported to construct the Eiffel Tower. These two clubs retained a strong English influence and the majority of the “French” team were, in fact, English expatriates. Understandably, these British residents played a major role in arranging the match and three of the players were members of the nine-man Organizing Committee. Philip Tomalin, who captained the French Olympic team, also served as cricket chairman of the French Sports Federation and it is to him that much of the credit must be given for this unique event on the Olympic calendar. Also serving on Tomalin’s organizing Committee were the players T. H. Jordan and A. McEvoy.

The visitors were the “Devon & Somerset Wanderers Cricket Club” a well established touring side which had been formed by William Donne (who later played in the 1900 Olympic match) for a tour of the Isle of Wight in 1894. Their visit to Paris in 1900, when they based themselves at the Hotel des Trois Princes, was the sixth tour they had undertaken and they won all three of the matches they played in the Paris area in 1900. The “Wanderers” were centered on the Castle Cary Club in Somerset and their touring teams were supplemented by players from the surrounding area who were able to leave work and home for tours of two weeks duration. There were five Castle Gary players in the 1900 Olympic team and the team also had a strong affiliation with the Devon public school, Blundell’s, who numbered four former pupils in the Olympic team.

Both teams in Paris were made up of distinctly average club cricketers, the only exception being two “Wanderers” players who had experience of the first class game. Montague Toller played six matches for Somerset in 1897 and Alfred Bowerman played once for Somerset in 1900 and made a second appearance in 1905.

The match was originally arranged with the usual eleven players in each team but, by agreement, an additional player was brought into each team at the last minute. Harry Comer joined the visiting team and J. Braid was added to the original French selection. Although the game was essentially between two club sides, posters and handbills give the occasion a fuller international flavor by announcing that it was a match between France and England. There was no mention of the Olympic Games in the pre-match publicity but the affiliation with the Paris Exhibition is quite clear.

Play began before a handful of spectators at 11:00 AM on Sunday, an hours break for lunch was taken at noon and, when play resumed in the afternoon, the visitors were all out for

117 runs. The host team replied with a score of 78 and play finished for the day at 5 PM. With an overnight lead of 39 the “Wanderers” gave a vastly improved batting display in the second innings and declared their innings closed at 145 runs for 5 wickets. Needing 185 runs to win, the French batting completely fell apart in the second innings. No one scored in double figures and of their six players who failed to score at all, four had also been dismissed without scoring in the first innings. After losing 10 wickets for only eleven runs the French attempted to play out time but the “Wanderers” finally won by 158 runs with five minutes to spare. Not surprisingly, the architect of the victory was the player with the most experience of the first class game, Montague Toller, who took seven wickets - all of them clean bowled - for nine runs.

To mark the 90th anniversary of the match the Standard Athletic Club invited the Old Blundellians Cricket Club to Paris. As has already been noted, Blundell’s School provided four players in the original team and the match, which was played on 11-12 July 1990, resulted in a draw. At the convivial post-match dinner, it was claimed that “England had retained the Olympic title!”

SCORECARD

ENGLAND (GREAT BRITAIN) [262] Devon & Somerset Wanderers

	1st Innings		2nd Innings
J. Symes c Anderson b Robinson	15	c Attrill b Roques	1
A. J. Powlesland c Browning b Robinson	10	b Roques	4
C. B. K. Beachcroft b Attrill	23	run out	54
M. H. Toller b McEvoy	2		
F. W. Cuming c Browning b McEvoy	38	c Attrill b McEvoy	18
A. Bowerman b Anderson	7	b Roques	59
H. R. Comer lbw Anderson	4	not out	5
A. E. Birkett b Anderson	1		
F. W. Christian b Anderson	0		
W. S. Donne run out	6		
G. J. Buckley b Attrill	0		
F. R. Burchell not out	0		
Extras	9		
Totals	117		145-5 (declared)

FRANCE [104]

Union Club and Standard Athletic Club representing Union des Sociétés Français de Sports Athletiques (USFSA)

T. H. Jordan c Comer b Christian	11	b Toller	0
A. J. Schneidau b Christian	8	b Powlesland	1
R. Home c Buckley b Christian	15	b Powlesland	1
H. Terry, Jr. c Cuming b Powlesland	2	b Toller	1
F. Roques b Powlesland	0	b Toller	0
W. Anderson b Christian	0	b Toller	8
D. Robinson b Christian	0	b Powlesland	0
W. T. Attrill lbw Christian	0	b Toller	0
W. Browning b Christian	0	b Toller	0
A. McEvoy b Bowerman	1	c Christian b Comer	0
P. H. Tomalin not out	3	not out	6
J. Braid run out	25	b Toller	7
Extras	13		2
Totals	78		26

Umpires: Wlilan(?) & Delolme